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ABSTRACT

Two resource centers were funded by the Illinois Alcoholism Prevention Initiative to facilitate primary prevention and health promotion efforts at the local level. Located in DeKalb and Springfield, the centers assisted the Illinois State Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Division of Alcoholism in building a body of knowledge on strategies and approaches, in coordinating and encouraging the exchange of ideas, and in channeling information and resources to appropriate service providers in communities. By working with existing local community agencies and resources, the resource centers tailored health promotion strategies to community needs on a statewide basis. The program emphasizes proactive activities that prevent, reduce, or eliminate causes of health problems, especially problems related to alcoholism or drug abuse, for citizens of all ages. Center administrators and staff members have varied backgrounds, including community mental health, drug education, governmental studies, alcoholism counseling, technical management, and media development. Technical assistance is offered to schools, local human service agencies, and community organizations. The centers strive to provide the information, skills, and environment to encourage people to exercise control over their health. (FG)

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THE ILLINOIS ALCOHOLISM PREVENTION INITIATIVE: A STATE-WIDE HEALTH PROMOTION AND PRIMARY PREVENTION PROJECT*

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ABSTRACT

The current emphasis on reactive/curative health programs is resulting in prohibitive economic costs and unsatisfactory improvements in quality lifestyles available to people. The presentation will explore rationales and strategies for reallocating resources to health promotion and prevention health programs that are proactive/habilitating. Carefully planned educational programs that recognize that healthy people are at high-risk of losing their health, if some effective intervention is not made, can help people and communities help themselves improve the quality of their lives and improve the cost effectiveness of community health programs.

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THE ILLINOIS ALCOHOLISM PREVENTION INITIATIVE: A STATE WIDE HEALTH PROMOTION AND PRIMARY PREVENTION PROJECT

Sometimes, when we ask questions, we need to look outside of ourselves for assistance in finding the answers. We often turn to other people or institutions for information and direction when we choose to change, rather than accept the way things are---for that reason the Illinois Alcoholism Prevention Initiative funded numerous community-based demonstration projects. To support these and other efforts, two resource centers were created. They are intended to facilitate primary prevention and health promotion efforts throughout the State of Illinois. The center serving the northern part of Illinois located at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. is referred to as PRN (Prevention Resources project, Northern Illinois University). Project PRC, established to serve programs and people in central and southern Illinois, is located in Springfield. These centers offer a means by which communities and human service providers interested in the health status of the people of Illinois can work together. The development of resource sharing constituencies, of skill training programs, of technical assistance and consultation services are encouraged by the centers.

PRN and PRC assist the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities/Division of Alcoholism toward building a body of knowledge regarding various strategies,

methods, and approaches in health promotion and primary prevention programming. An important function of the two state-wide Prevention Resource Centers is to coordinate existing resources and facilitate the exchange of ideas, as well as to channel the flow of information and resources to appropriate service providers and communities.

We encourage people to share what they learn about preventing health problems such as alcohol misuse. Supporting health promotion efforts is also encouraged. By working together and pooling our resources, we strive to maximize our impact on communities --- confined to our limited resources and individual ideas, we are doomed to ineffectiveness and duplication. We work to cooperate with existing public and private programs as well as by establishing new lines of communication that enable us to deliver our services and respond to diverse and unique community needs. By employing the available resources within local communities to solve local problems, we can tailor health promotion and primary prevention strategies to accommodate particular community needs We don't presume to have all the answers for the serious community health issues such as the prevention of substance misuse...only a good sense of the direction we should take. It's critical that we ask the right questions before we look for the right answers.

Because the effects of alcohol and other substance misuse are so dramatic, they often masquerade for the <u>real</u>

problem, which is not simply a drug problem, or an alcohol problem...but a human problem. People turn to chemicals to help them feel better...to relieve feelings of anxiety, depression, apathy or boredom. The problem does not lie in the chemical, but in the human need. The magnitude of the problem of alcohol and drug misuse is indisputable. It has been well-documented by governmental task forces and its tragic effects on people's lives is evident. The growing incidence of substance misuse among young people is particularly alarming. Perhaps even more alarming is the extent to which all of us have become conditioned to rely upon chemical instant solutions, whether they be aspirin an antihistamine or a scotch and water. Expecting them to automatically relieve our pain and make us happy or successful creates serious inter- and intrapersonal problems.

The people and policy makers of Illinois have only recently begun to ask the question...what can be done to prevent alcohol and other substance dependencies? Will prevention work? Supporting programs designed to reduce the problems such as alcoholism before they occur are relatively new. In fact, it wasn't until July, 1976 that the State of Illinois decided to make the private problem of alcohol misuse a public concern. The Illinois Alcoholism and Intoxication Treatment Act attempted to address the many problems occurring from the misuse of alcohol...drunken driving, child abuse and neglect, vandalism and physical

illnesses. A later development of this public concern was the establishment of an Illinois Alcoholism Prevention Initiative---IAPI. Encouraging the development of primary prevention and health promotion components as part of comprehensive community health programs has become a key concept of this initiative.

People involved in health promotion and primary prevention often ask the question, "What do we want to prevent?" We are also vitally interested in asking the question, "What do we want to promote?"

Rather than focusing only on what people do wrong and emphasizing the seriousness of alcoholism, we want to look at what people do that is right, the coping strategies that enable them to keep from becoming dependent upon certain substances. We want to learn all we can about how to develop <u>healthy</u> individuals and communities who are as <u>self-reliant</u> as possible. People empowered to act in their own best interest and the best interest of their communities encourages positive lifestyles. Although the needs of people who chronically or acutely misuse chemicals are conspicuous, dramatic and often require reactionary treatment-oriented activities, we believe that we should reallocate some of our attention to primary prevention and health promotion activities...proactive activities that enable communities to implement strategies that may reduce or eliminate the <u>causes</u> of health problems. Many of these conditions may not be as visible, but they are just as

critical. If we must choose between reallocating some of the resources required to cure what is often beyond our grasp and investing in resources for developing skills that we know can be learned and used to sustain healthy, fulfilled lives...our direction is clear. Granted, it is not an easy decision. It is a case of community health triage. It is a decision we must make if we want to do better and feel better rather than remain, as John Knowles has characterized us---doing better and feeling worse.

Therefore, the efforts of the two Prevention Resources Centers are directed at positive lifestyle benefits encompassing people of all ages. We support the concept that people are less likely to misuse alcohol and other chemicals if given accurate information and opportunities to establish healthy attitudes and behavior patterns. This includes the need for communities to provide social and physical environments that encourage such responses. We believe in fostering the cooperation between all aspects of community health, public and private, in the best interest of the citizens of Illinois.

The Prevention Resource Centers strive to inform, motivate and help communities develop programs that assist people in adopting healthful lifestyles. Our efforts focus on helping well people maintain or improve their present health status, whether that's accomplished by providing information regarding nutrition, decision-making strategies, or suggesting alternatives to inappropriate alcohol use. In

the past we have seriously neglected opportunities to help communities devise programs that empower people with survival skills and encourage them to accept responsibility for maintaining their own well-being. By developing locally based programs to deal with threats, losses or challenges, it is possible to develop greater problem-solving skills for achieving improved growth and achievement as well as dealing with crisis.

We believe that a significant contributor to alcohol misuse is people who feel disempowered...a sense that they are not in control of their own lives. Therefore, much of the effort of the Prevention Resource Centers with community programs is focused on the strategies for improving intra- and interpersonal growth of people---enhancing their self esteem, helping them to express their feelings and build relationships---empowering them to feel responsible for controlling their own lives. Hopefully, such programs will reduce the need to use alcohol to achieve these feelings. Although some of our efforts will be substance specific, the focus will always be on human growth and achievement rather than substance misuse, because we believe that such disabling practices are more often the result of a lack of skill in coping with lifestyle demands.

The Prevention Resources Centers share information describing successful prevention efforts, their program methodologies and implementation strategies. We help community based programs develop prevention strategies,

curriculum or media campaigns that promote healthy lifestyles. One of the most important functions is providing resource people who's skills and experiences can assist others in designing and implementing strategies for their own communities.

Leadership for the Illinois Alcoholism Prevention Initiative has come from Ruth Holl of the Division of Alcoholism. She was able to undertake this innovative program because of the foresight of Jenny Alderman, Associate Director for Alcoholism Services, Illinois Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, and the consultation of Mark Amy and David Weisbrod. More recently, responsibility for managing this effort has been the task of Les Netland, Prevention Coordinator for the Division. The director of PRN, Dr. Jerald Floyd, has been involved in health education for over 18 years, with particular attention to developing drug education courses and workshops, as well as publishing numerous professional papers regarding health promotion and substance misuse. Ann Monroe serves as project director of PRC and has acquired her experience at top administrative levels within community mental health and social service fields. Both executive directors are responsible for conceptualizing, implementing, and directing organizational, programmatic and personnel systems. Additional staff members at both Resource Centers bring a variety of experiences ranging from community mental health, to governmental studies, to alcoholism counseling,

to technical management and media development. The staff can provide basic knowledge about human behavior and community health...they can identify existing human and material resources to meet the unique community needs.

By maintaining relationships with local, state and national resource organizations, the centers can maximize the use of already developed materials and make these materials available to Illinois programs. Technical assistance offered to schools, local human service agencies and community organizations consists largely of facilitating and overcoming barriers encountered by local programs. Our technical assistance is geared to facilitate program's abilities to deliver quality services as well as to maintain their efforts. An expanding resource pool of speakers and consultants is maintained to provide assistance to communities when needed.

In our short history, we have discovered that throughout Illinois, people in health related programs are operating with or without an awareness of the prevention impact they are having. In an effort to identify and build a health promotion and primary prevention constituency, staff members are available to discuss our programs with anyone wanting to learn about how these elements of a community's health system fit into their spectrum of concerns and interests. Again our services are designed to provide a valuable link between individuals and groups who now see themselves as isolated in their efforts. In

addition, Resource Center Newsletters are used to increase communication and build a sense of community among prevention people.

The Resource Centers are something new in health promotion and primary prevention programming in Illinois. They encourage public and private sector cooperation whereby communities can work together with federal, state and local governments to achieve mutual goals. PRN and Project PRC encourage community organization processes that bring together the leadership needed for communities to assess their own problems and needs and to find local solutions. The intimate involvement of local people in planning, initiating, implementing, and in many cases, evaluating the problem is extremely important---local ownership is the key issue. The Resource Centers act as brokers of strategies derived from past, current and future projects that result from communities developing primary prevention programs. Although our goal is the prevention of alcohol misuse and its consequences, the Resource Centers provide models that can be used by other public and private agencies. The Illinois Alcoholism Prevention Initiative, through its Resource Centers, stresses the following concepts: Work with the local community in conducting a needs analysis and in planning projects that will inspire participation, ride and ownership; coordinate and facilitate community resources and institutions already in place to create projects to improve life through self-sustaining programs. Such

strategies often can overcome obstacles because they draw upon the vitality and the diversity of the whole community. Though programs are community based, IAPI provides a state-wide structure of support by offering technical assistance and consultation throughout the process. Community programs thus developed utilize the means and resources of government, the consultation and technical assistance skills of experts including the Resource Centers staffs, and the knowledge of local people about the needs of their communities; such collaboration often is able to accomplish what none can do separately.

The recent concern for health promotion and primary prevention programs is justified. But no one has a monopoly on right answers. The more sources of new ideas, the better. We believe that there is room for different perspectives and values...for each of us to live in a lifestyle of our own choosing. Our choices may differ, but we believe that there is space and a place for us all. We do not expect that through our efforts alcoholism will cease to exist, that crisis or stressful situations will not occur in people's lives, that communities will not feel helpless in some situations, but rather that when faced with those situations, people will have the information, skills and environments that enable them to exercise control over their own lives, to grow out of adversity as well as prosperity, to participate in life more effectively, and to make more informed choices and appropriate reactions---particularly in

the way they use alcohol.